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OUTDOOR RELIEF
OF THE POOR
in
Westchester County



A STUDY

Based Primarily on the Records of 1916
together with some references to subsequent conditions
by the

WESTCHESTER COUNTY RESEARCH BUREAU
15 COURT STREET, WHITE PLAINS, N. Y.

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Classification of Poor Relief

To avoid the confusion ordinarily experienced by the layman setting out to obtain charitable aid for persons not capable of self-support, it should be explained that poor relief is classified in two ways:—

I. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

1. Public Relief

Public relief is that given at the expense of the taxpayer out of funds levied upon, and collected from the public by properly constituted governmental authorities, and is administered by state agencies, county agencies, or town or city agencies, as will be explained later.

2. Private Relief

Private relief is relief given by individuals or by independent civic organizations (such as charity organizations, or the children's aid societies, or privately owned and conducted hospitals, etc.).

Institutions and societies of the latter class are supported by private contributions from individual citizens and not from tax moneys.

Public relief is sometimes given in private institutions as follows:

When the public institutions for the accommodation of the poor are not large enough or not suitably equipped to accommodate all cases which demand relief at public expense, the proper officers in charge of such cases commit them to private institutions (under arrangement and agreement with such institutions) and the public pays the private institutions the charges for maintenance of such cases.

II. INSTITUTIONAL AND OUTDOOR RELIEF

Poor relief, public or private, may be either institutional or outdoor relief.

1. Institutional Relief

Institutional relief is provided within the shelter of an institution such as an almshouse (public relief) or a privately supported institution (private relief).

2. Outdoor Relief

"Outdoor Relief" is a term used to describe relief administered to poor persons who are not sent to an institution. It does not mean out-of-doors, but simply outside of the doors of institutions. The recipients of such relief in most cases remain in their own homes.

Public relief is regulated by law as to the amount which may be furnished, the persons to whom it may be given, the places where it may be given, i. e., whether outdoor relief or institutional, and what officials shall administer the several kinds of relief provided for.

Private relief is limited only by the amount of funds provided for such relief and the judgment of the persons duly appointed to distribute such relief.

Scope of this Study

This study will deal with the type of public relief administered in the townships of Westchester County, under the laws of the State of New York, and the regulations of the local legislative bodies of the county and of towns. In other words, it will deal only with public outdoor relief and the commitment of paupers to institutions by overseers of the poor.

The main purposes of the study were as follows:

1. To determine how far the statutory procedure is carried out by the overseers; i. e., the knowledge of, and compliance with, the poor laws by the officers responsible for their administration.
2. To determine the general qualifications of the overseers of the poor.
3. To ascertain the general quality of outdoor relief.

The period primarily covered by the investigation was the fiscal year 1916 although some attention has been given to preceding and later periods.

The four cities of Westchester County were not included in this study.

Sources of Information

The sources from which the information in the following report has been obtained are as follows:

1. Reports of the overseers to the County Superintendent of the Poor.
2. The original records on file in the offices of the several town supervisors and town clerks.
3. The original records of the overseers of the poor.
4. Reports by the Bureau of Municipal Accounts of the State Comptroller's Department, of examinations made by that bureau's examiners in the several towns in Westchester County.
(The representative of the Bureau visited the comptroller's office at Albany and examined all the Westchester County records).
5. Personal interviews with families relieved; with grocers who filled the orders of the overseers of the poor; and with citizens of the various towns.
6. The records of the County Treasurer.
7. The records of the County Superintendent of the Poor, and subsequently those of the Commissioner of Charities and Corrections.
8. The records and reports of the State Charities Aid Association.
9. The statutes of the State of New York.
10. The resolutions of the Board of Supervisors and the resolutions of the town boards.

Control of Poor Relief

Poor Relief in Westchester County was governed until January 1st, 1917 by the general Poor Law of the State, and since that date in part by a particular act applying only to Westchester County.

In most cases the officers charged with the administration of poor relief are a County Superintendent of the Poor, a Commissioner of Charities and Corrections for each city, and one or more Overseers of the Poor for each town. Westchester County had a Superintendent of the Poor during 1916 and until January 1st, 1917, when, under a special act, applying only to Westchester County, the office of Commissioner of Charities and Corrections was created. Under this act, the County Commissioner is charged with the duties of Superintendent of the Poor, and with additional duties of far-reaching importance. The incumbent of this new office in Westchester County has been responsible since January 1st, 1917, for the administration of the County Almshouse, the County Hospital, the Poor Farm, and also the County Workhouse and Penitentiary.

Under the County Commissioner is the well organized Department of Child Welfare which has the supervision and care of all children supported by public funds in the County. This department also administers the County's Mothers' Allowance Fund from which, with the consent of the local Supervisor, or city commissioner of charities, regular monthly relief may be granted to a mother to maintain her young children with her in her own home. This system has been in operation in all of the towns of the County except Cortlandt where the Supervisor at present in office for a long time refused to approve the granting of any such allowances.

Practically the only duties and powers now left to the overseers of the poor are the administration of temporary relief and the commitment of poor to the almshouse. Even the administration of temporary relief is limited. By virtue of the powers of his office, the County Commissioner decides in disputed cases whether the person to be relieved has a year's settlement in the County, and if so, in which township he is settled. In this way he determines which town should be responsible for the care of such a person.

By section 23 of the Poor Law it is provided that: "No greater sum than ten dollars shall be expended or paid for the relief of any one poor person or family without the sanction, in writing, of one of the superintendents of the poor of the County... except when the Board of Supervisors or Town Board has made rules and regulations as prescribed in section 13."

Section 13 provides that: "The Board of Supervisors of any County may make such rules and regulations as it may deem proper in regard to the manner of furnishing temporary or out-door relief to the poor in the several towns in said County, and provided the Board of Supervisors shall have failed to make any such rules and regulations the Town Board of any town may make such rules and regulations as it may deem proper in regard to furnishing temporary or out-door relief to the poor in their respective towns by the overseer or overseers of the poor thereof, and also in regard to the amount such overseer or overseers of the poor may expend for the relief of each person or family." If such regulations are made by either the Super-

visors or the Town Board, the Superintendent's (Commissioner's) signature is not needed.

These sections when it is sought to apply them are not free from ambiguity. The Supervisors apparently are given no power to fix amounts of relief. The Town Boards have no power to do so if the Supervisors regulate the manner of affording relief. In the absence of regulations by either, what period does the ten dollar limitation cover? Is it ten dollars at one time, or during any fixed period as a month, or a year, or a term of office or what?

The first of these ambiguities is avoided in Westchester County by the entire failure of the Supervisors to make any regulations. The only reasonable solution of the other is that the ten dollar limit is on expenditure not yet approved and audited and perhaps paid by the Town Board; or else that it refers to the period of three months within which such bills are required regularly to be settled. (Sec. 25).

It should be noted, however, that some years ago it was held that if the Town Board subsequently approved an expenditure in excess of the ten dollars and ordered it paid, the payment would not be restrained at the suit of a taxpayer in the absence of fraud or wrongful intent. (36 N. Y. S. R. 457).

Procedure in Poor Relief

A poor person in order to obtain town aid must make application, or have it made for him, to the overseer of the poor.

The overseer is then required by law to make a personal investigation of the person or family for whom aid is asked.

He is required to record the alleged poor person's name, age, number of children, native country, and reasons for needing relief.

He must find out if the applicant has a legal settlement of one year's residence in the town, and whether help is really needed.

If it appears that the person requires permanent assistance, it is the overseer's duty to commit the person to the almshouse.

The overseer is usually required by the town board to give a written "poor-relief" order, not an oral one, to the dealer on whom the order is to be drawn.

He is required to make an audit of all such bills.

He is also required to make a monthly examination into the condition and necessities of poor persons being relieved by the town, to determine whether they are still in need, and if so, to what extent.

Administration of Outdoor Relief

QUALIFICATIONS OF OVERSEERS

All overseers in office in Westchester County at the time of our investigation were old residents of their towns and had a fairly wide acquaintance with the poor residents.

Age: The average age of the overseers was 46.8 years. Two of those interviewed appeared to be too old for the efficient administration of their office.

Length of Service: The average length of service of overseers in office in 1916 was over eight and one half years.

Length of Residence: Their average length of residence in a town was 32 years.

Regular Occupation: The twenty-five overseers in office in Westchester County were regularly engaged outside their official duties as overseer, in the following occupations:

Laborers	1
Small farming	2
Marble cutter	1
Contractor	2
Blacksmith	1
Painter and decorator	4
Baggage master	1
Bar-keeper	1
Florist	1
Agent	1
General farmer	1
Tinsmith	1
Road patrolman	1
Miller	1
Horse trainer	1
No occupation	5
Total.....	25

Previous Occupation

Same as stated above.....	18
Mail driver	1
Butcher	1
Machinist	1
Blacksmith	1
Auto shop	1
Miller	1
Musician, clerk	1
Total.....	25

Habits

The judgment of the investigator as to the habits of the overseers may be summed up as follows:

"Good"	9
"Probably good"	1
"Clean"	2
"Drinks a little"	3
"Reported questionable"	1
"Commonly reported as drunkard"	2
Time of investigator not sufficient to ascertain personal habits	7
Total.....	25

Desire Re-election

Of the overseers in office, their desire for re-election may be summed up as follows:

Desire re-election	19
Do not desire re-election	2
Indifferent about it	4
Total	25

Reasons for attitude toward Re-election

By those who desire re-election the following reasons were assigned.

For the pay simply	7
For the pay and the enjoyment of the work	6
Because "doesn't mind it"	2
Because hates to get beaten	2
Because likes the official position	2

Total 19

Of those who did not desire re-election, or were in doubt about it, the following were assigned as the reasons:

Not enough pay	5
Too busy	1

Total 6

Remuneration Received

\$4.00 per day for each day of service	11
2.00 per day for each day of service	3
(under the law the latter are now entitled to \$4.00 a day)	

Salaries, \$1,200.00 a year	2
1,000.00 a year	4
750.00 a year	2
350.00 a year	1

No pay 2

Total 25

Other Public Office held in the Past by Overseers

Fire Warden	1
Town Constable (holding office also while overseer).....	1
Town Auditor	1
Truant Officer	1
No public office. (1 a member of Republican Committee of County)	21

Total 25

Education

Barely able to write	1
A few grades of grammar school	1
Completed the grammar school	16
High School	5
Education not reported	2
Education reported beyond High School	0

Total 25

Irregular Practices of Overseers

Amount of Outdoor Relief per Family

In the year 1916 the amount of relief given to single families ranged from a few dollars up to between four hundred and five hundred dollars in individual cases.

Clothing

Several overseers would not give to poor persons any orders to obtain clothing at the town's expense. Others gave sometimes complete outfits.

Luxuries

In eleven cases the overseers furnished luxuries at town expense to the poor. In seven cases no luxuries whatever were allowed and not even sugar. In seven cases it was not possible to examine supplies given to the poor in sufficient detail to find out about luxuries.

We have classed as table luxuries the following items allowed by overseers: oysters, oranges, mixed nuts, jars of jam, coffee at 36¢ per lb. (pre-war price), lamb chops, expensive cheese, honey, jumbles, cake and catsup.

It is probably true that many of the taxpayers helping to support the poor cannot afford to purchase commodities of the quality and at the price of those supplied to the indigent in the instances cited.

Excessive Transportation Rates

Mileage charged by overseers to East View (the almshouse) and return averaged twenty-two and a half cents a mile. Individual rates ranged from thirteen cents a mile to thirty-one cents a mile. Even the lowest rate is an excessive charge for mileage.

Legal Services

In some towns the overseer was allowed to employ legal services and in other towns not. In one town the sum of \$620.00 was charged for one year's legal services to the overseer. Of this amount, eleven days at \$15.00, a total of \$165.00, was charged for making out for the two overseers, their annual report to the Commissioner of Charities.

Tramps and Transients

There does not appear to be any authorization in the law for overseers to help transients. Nevertheless, the practice varies greatly in this respect. Some towns gave help regularly to transients, and in eleven towns no help at all was given to tramps.

Medical Relief

The investigator found the charges of doctors varying from fifty cents to two dollars a call. It would seem as though some regular but adequate fee should be established for poor calls within a certain radius.

Unnecessary Support

Several cases of unnecessary support were reported. One instance was found by the Bureau of a woman who admitted that she had no need for the town aid that she received. She had been told by business friends that she might as well have it because others were getting it, so she applied for it and got it.

Insufficient Support

Cases of insufficient support were sporadic and exceptional. In the case of seven overseers, however, the support given to the indigent was in many cases not sufficient for their needs.

Absence of Constructive Plan

Only two of the overseers seemed to have any constructive plan for giving relief. The care of the sick was usually deficient. Having once assigned a doctor to the case, the overseer seemed to feel that he had done his whole duty. One overseer was active in his efforts to remedy physical disabilities, resorting to surgical operations or taking other definite means to enable the disabled and dependent to become self-supporting. A constructive plan of relief with definite object of restoring the poor to self-support was otherwise something that none of the overseers appeared to understand with any degree of thoroughness.

Finding Work for the Unemployed

This is another feature of relief that seemed to be generally disregarded. Seven overseers gave no assistance in finding work. Eighteen "sometimes" helped a man to get a job.

Feebleminded Poor

Institutional care of the feebleminded seemed to be disregarded generally. It would seem that the feebleminded poor should be segregated. This is particularly true of adult females in order to prevent indiscriminate propagation of defectives.

Inaccessibility of Overseers

In numerous instances overseers were reported as almost inaccessible. The result is that really needy cases have suffered from lack of relief. Two cases were found where such inaccessibility was due to neglect. One overseer is reported to have purposely made it difficult to find him in order to decrease the number of requests for relief. In general, however, such inaccessibility is due to pre-occupation of overseers in personal business, some overseers being occupied their full time in outside work. In the latter cases, three, although paid a salary of \$1,000.00 a year each, were engaged in full time occupation outside. Four overseers were found to devote full time to the duties of their office.

Sale of Liquor to the Poor Permitted

Only two overseers were interviewed who knew that they had legal authority to prohibit the sale of liquor to persons receiving town aid. This is a very important provision of the law and every overseer should know it and enforce it.

Distinction between Town and County Charges

It would seem impossible that an overseer of the poor should be found who did not know the distinction between county poor and town poor, and how the support of each class should be charged, yet several overseers of the poor were found who were ignorant of this distinction.

Little Co-operation with Private Charities

There is, on the part of the overseers, little co-operation with private charities in most of the towns. As a result, in nearly all towns there is duplication of relief by the several independent agencies. Social workers often discover more needy families than their organizations can help adequately. Under a proper system of co-operation all such families could be relieved; and extreme suffering avoided, in the case of certain families which feel perhaps too keenly what they have been taught to consider the disgrace of applying for public relief.

Automobile Hire

Automobile hire for the transportation of poor persons was in many cases excessive. It would seem to be unnecessary to use automobiles except in cases of pressing emergency. However, one overseer was found to spend over \$3,000.00 of the town funds for automobile hire in the year 1916—enough then to buy five Ford cars and pay for gasoline and oil to operate them for a year. Practices in transportation varied. Several overseers used trains and buses for transportation, and never hired automobiles except in the case of sickness. Others were found who never used anything but automobiles for travel connected with their office.

Further Irregularities

Many towns in Westchester County have violated the State Law governing temporary relief. As previously stated herein, Sec. 13 of the Poor Law gives the Town Board authority to adopt rules and regulations for out-door relief when the Supervisors have failed to do so. In cases where the Town Board has made such provision, overseers may legally expend any amount so authorized without awaiting permission of the County Commissioner. They need consult the Town Board only as directed in such provision. But since none of the towns visited had any such regulation as provided by Sec. 13, the overseer in each case was controlled by Sec. 23 of the Poor Law. This section requires him, in the absence of such regulations, to get the written consent of the town supervisor *for any relief under ten dollars*, and the written consent of both supervisor and County Commissioner whenever the total amount granted to any one family or person shall exceed ten dollars.

Some overseers interpreted the law to allow ten dollars a year to a family without the overseer's consulting anyone; others thought the law allowed ten dollars a month, and two thought that no limit was set in total amount, but merely a limit of ten dollars at a time. We have suggested above what seems to us a more probable construction. Whether or not this law is a wise one, it is pointed out as above that it is not carried out in Westchester County. Each Town Board that desires to legalize such practices as described should pass resolutions pursuant to Sec. 13 of the Poor Law.

Degree of Knowledge of and Compliance With the Law By Overseers of the Poor

THE LAW

OVERSEERS' PRACTICE

Personal Investigation

Sec. 20 of the Poor Law requires personal investigation by the overseer of all applications for relief.

3 made no personal investigation.
22 stated that they made personal investigations.

Legal Settlement

Sec. 40 of the Poor Law requires settlement of one year before the person may be made a town charge.

3 did not know the definition of a legal settlement.
22 were correct in their interpretation.

Permanent Outdoor Relief

Sec. 20 of the Poor Law requires that permanent relief and support be furnished only in the almshouse unless the poor person is incapable of being removed to the almshouse.

21 illegally granted permanent relief outside of the almshouse
4 did not grant permanent outdoor relief.

Monthly Investigations

Sec. 25 of the Poor Law seems to require overseers to make a monthly investigation into the condition and necessities of the town poor outside of institutions.

13 made no monthly investigations.
12 made monthly investigations.

Audit of Bills by Overseer

Sec. 25 of the Poor Law seems to require the audit and allowance by the overseer of all bills against the town for things furnished to poor persons pursuant to his orders or otherwise.

17 made no audit.
8 made audit.

Compelling Support When Capable

Chap. 143 of the laws of 1913 requires the support of poor persons by parents or children of poor when capable.

3 ignorant of this law.
22 aware of it.

Record of Overseers

Sec. 26 of the Poor Law requires overseers to record name, age, sex, and native country of every poor person relieved by them—also statement of cause necessitating relief.

7 kept incomplete records.
17 complete for most of the people relieved.
1 overseer kept complete records about every case.

Illegal Practices of Towns

THE LAW

PRACTICE OF TOWN AUTHORITIES

Itemization

Sec. 175 of the Town Law reads "All accounts and claims against the towns must be made out in items verified by, or in behalf of the claimant," and similar and more stringent provision is found in Sec. 25 of the Poor Law.

15 towns had incomplete itemization.
3 correct.

Verification

Sec. 25 of the Poor Law requires that poor claims or accounts be verified by the claimant to the effect that such care, support, supplies, or attendance have been actually furnished for such poor persons; that such poor persons have actually received the same, and that prices charged therefor are reasonable and not above the usual market rates.

8 towns had improper verification.

10 towns had correct verification.

Payment of Poor Bills Every Three Months

Sec. 25 of the Poor Law requires that poor bills be settled once in every three months.

2 towns did not pay every three months.

16 towns paid every three months.

Contribution to Private Charities

Art. VIII, Sec. 10 of the State constitution reads "No county, city, town, or village, shall hereafter give any money or property or loan its money or credit to, or in aid of any individual, association or corporation.

3 towns made apparently illegal contributions to private charities.

15 did not.

Compliance with Insanity Law by Towns and Overseers

Sec. 84 of the Insanity Law requires that the fees of physicians employed by health officers for the purpose of examining alleged insane persons are to be allowed by the judge ordering commitment, certified to and by the County Treasurer and charged to the municipality liable therefor.

15 towns failed to meet these requirements.

3 complied with the law.

Illegal Payments to Overseers

Chap. 542 of the Laws of 1915, Sec. 1 provides for compensation for overseers as follows:

12 towns made illegal payments to their overseers.

a. \$2 per day unless a different rate be fixed by or pursuant to this section.

Of these:

2 towns paid only \$2 a day.

b. Board of Supervisors of County may by resolution, fix the compensation at more than \$2 but not more than \$4 per day. (Such a resolution has been passed in Westchester County and here non-salaried overseers are entitled to \$4 for each day's work as overseer).

All except two paid full day's pay for only a part day's work.

6 towns made no illegal payments to overseers.

c. Town board of town whose assessed valuation of taxable real and personal property is ten million dollars or more may allow not over \$1,000 a year in lieu of the per diem compensation provided by this section.

1 town paid \$1,200 each to two elected overseers though limited by law to \$1,000.

- d. If compensation is fixed on per diem basis, he shall not be entitled to receive more than one day's compensation on account of services performed on the same calendar day.

This provision of subdivision "d" has been frequently violated, though violations are not always easy to detect. One overseer charged and was paid per diem compensation for 366 days in the year 1916.

Audit of Own Bills by Town Board

Sec. 13 of the Town Law reads: A member of the town board or board of town auditors shall not present for audit a claim or demand against the town assigned to him by another in which he is directly or indirectly interested, except

At least one town violated this law.

- a. His per diem compensation for attendance upon meetings of the town board, and
- b. The fees allowed to him by law for services rendered in his official capacity.

Further Illegalities

Report of Poor Expenditures by Town Supervisors

Sec. 141 of the Poor Law provides that:

The supervisor of every town where all the poor are not a county charge, shall report to the clerk of the board of supervisors within fifteen days after the accounts of the overseer of the poor have been settled by the town board at its first annual meeting in each year, giving an abstract of all such accounts, which shall exhibit, the number of poor persons that have been relieved or supported in such town during the preceding year, specifying:

None of the town supervisors made a report complying with this law.

- a. The number of county poor and town poor.
- b. The whole expense of such support.
- c. The allowance made to overseers, justices, constables, or other officers which shall not comprise any part of the actual expenses of maintaining the poor.

Cost of Public Outdoor Relief in the Townships

In the year 1916 the eighteen townships of Westchester County expended \$82,156.27 for outdoor poor relief. Of that amount, \$20,823.35 was spent for the compensation of overseers and for their expenses. In other words, it costs practically \$1.00 extra to spend \$3.00 for relief, or to put it another way, to give a person a dollar's worth of relief, it costs an average of one and one third dollars to the tax payer.

It is the belief of the Bureau that a well organized social service department employing five or six trained investigators each equipped with an inexpensive car for traversing the large distances that sometimes have to be covered, and each authorized to administer temporary relief under the control of the County Commissioner of Charities, could bring about much more acceptable conditions among the poor, put many of the present paupers back into self supporting conditions, deal much more scientifically and satisfactorily with cases demanding institutional care, and cost the tax payer less as a whole than the towns now pay for a very inadequate and improperly administered system of care for the poor.

The following table shows how the \$82,136.27 was apportioned by the different towns among various headings.

1916
Amounts expended by the Several Towns of Westchester County for Outdoor Relief of the Poor.

	Total	Rent	Fuel	Groceries & Provisions	Rooms & Board	Clothing	Medical Attendance	Lunacy Examinations	Drugs & Medicines	Relief Unitemized
Bedford	\$ 1,073.23	.....	\$ 142.26	\$ 181.44	.....	\$ 44.95	\$ 49.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 2.50	.....
Cortlandt ..	11,791.09	\$ 804.50	1,487.53	4,024.29	.....	608.05	787.82	130.00	8.95	.....
Greenburgh	24,120.72	462.24	1,521.62	5,814.32	\$66.57	1,952.93	2,626.60	170.00	278.10	\$1,651.75
Eastchester	1,975.17	.....	260.50	600.50	.....	123.67	37.00	40.00	9.40	.....
Harrison ..	3,945.66	5.50	365.76	1,029.90	28.75	80.80	213.00	60.00	35.95	.....
Lewisboro ..	237.00	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	117.00
Mamaroneck	3,866.23	554.70	529.12	1,199.39	.....	64.46	194.00	.....	47.95	.....
Mt. Pleasant	7,250.23	.....	599.13	3,128.78	.....	.....	18.40	140.00	.....	.....
New Castle..	950.40	.....	7.50	177.50	.....	.....	117.00	.....	.....	.....
North Castle	380.81	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	306.16
North Salem	246.00	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	50.00	.....	.....	.....
Ossining ...	5,047.00	560.00	673.03	1,405.14	.....	61.69	287.75	.....	19.25	.....
Pelham	22.75	.....	12.75	10.00	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Poundridge	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Rye	19,520.96	1,686.00	1,963.80	8,237.86	.....	543.68	442.00	270.42	266.70	.....
Scarsdale ..	231.00	.....	.....	144.00	.....	.....	8.00	.....	.....	.....
Somers	113.15	.....	14.15	.....	.....	2.00	12.00	.....	.....	.....
Yorktown...	1,334.87	59.50	15.00	108.40	.....	.....	36.50	185.00	.....	.....
Total	\$82,156.27	\$4,132.44	\$7,592.15	\$26,062.52	\$95.32	\$3,482.23	\$4,879.07	\$1,015.42	\$668.80	\$2,074.91

	Guarding Insane	Burials	Auto Hire	Compen- sation Overseers	Expenses Overseers	Hospital	Legal Services	Printing	Care of Soldiers' Graves	Mis- cellane- ous
Bedford	\$ 10.00		\$ 146.00	470.00	\$ 7.08	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Cortlandt	340.00		155.75	2,375.00	332.37	\$ 17.80	\$620.00	\$57.50	.....	\$ 40.53
Greenburgh. \$229.50	415.00		3,536.00	1,796.68	1,842.48	1,540.13	12.30	.....	.....	4.50
Eastchester.	20.00		131.35	350.00	64.15	338.60	.....	.....	.....	.....
Harrison	40.00		49.00	1,974.00	.....	38.00	25.00	.....	.....	.....
Lewisboro .....	.....		.....	170.00	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Mamaroneck	50.00		76.50	1,000.00	59.06	.....	.....	35.00	.....	56.05
Mt. Pleasant	180.00		142.50	1,500.00	51.73	354.36	10.00	.....	22.00	*1,103.33
New Castle..	20.00		100.00	399.40	2.00	100.00	27.00	.....	.....	.....
North Castle .....	.....		.....	74.65	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
North Salem. ....	.....		80.00	116.00	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Ossining	40.00		37.50	1,000.00	81.64	477.65	.....	.....	.....	293.35
Pelham .....	.....		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Poundridge.. ..	.....		.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Rye	145.00		70.00	1,999.96	174.60	3,300.39	.....	.....	.....	197.35
Scarsdale .....	.....		20.00	14.00	.....	45.00	.....	.....	.....	.....
Somers .....	.....		20.00	65.00	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
Yorktown..	20.00		25.00	191.00	123.15	281.00	.....	.....	.....	143.48
\$229.50	\$1,280.00		\$4,589.60	\$13,495.69	\$2,738.26	\$6,492.93	\$694.30	\$92.50	\$22.00	\$1,838.59

* Vouchers not on file to explain this item.

LOCAL CAUSES OF CASES OF POVERTY

Replies to our inquiries as to the local causes of poverty were of great variety. Among them we may mention the following:

1—Saloons

In towns where there were no saloons, poor relief expenses were very small or entirely absent. With the presence of saloons, the contrary condition prevailed. In saloon towns the receipts from excise taxes were very properly used for poor relief, but were inadequate to offset the greater expense.

2—Irregular Employment

Lack of full time industries was usually associated with poverty, markedly so in towns containing large villages. Resultant wages were frequently too low for sufficient support, the result being that the public must supplement such low pay. How far the lack of full time employment was voluntary on the part of the employee is a question into which we were unable to go.

Little poverty was found to exist in farming districts.

3—Shiftless Foreign and Colored Element

Overseers complained, in towns where there was a considerable number of Italians that the unskilled laborers of this race were especially shiftless and likely to impose upon the town with frequent requests for relief. Some overseers reported that certain Italians who had thus obtained relief were afterwards found to have savings bank accounts. One instance was found where an Italian, particularly insistent on his bitter need of fuel, had traded his fuel order partly for cash.

Similar complaints were made by overseers regarding certain elements of the colored population, although these were not so serious as in the case of the Italian element described.

4—Desertion of Families

Numerous cases of desertion were found, when families were left in grave distress. According to the testimony of overseers, these desertions were most numerous among Italians.

5—Death of Wage Earning Husband or Father

This was found locally to be a frequent cause of poverty. Admirable relief of widows is being provided for through the mother's allowance fund administered by the Child Welfare Department.

6—Laxness in Enforcing Legal Settlements

Where paupers find the question of legal settlement not thoroughly investigated, it is much easier for the shiftless and lazy to obtain public relief. Where the provisions of the law are rigidly insisted upon, cases of poor relief are less frequent. The applicant is more often brought to earn his own support.

7—Old Age, etc.

The prevention of dependency upon public relief in old age calls for serious study. The same may be said regarding poverty resulting from sickness, accident, feeble-mindedness, and other such causes. Such studies are being conducted by various bodies.

The discussion of general causes of poverty is far too large a subject to be included in this paper. Volumes of study have been given to it by such men as Warner, Glenn, and Devine. Professor Devine is optimistic on the subject. It is his belief that poverty can be eliminated from society. But that study, while akin to our own, is social. Ours is legislative and administrative. We confine our discussion, therefore, to the existing poor law, its practical enforcement, its failures, and how both the law and its administration may be improved.

UNSUITABLE POLITICAL STRUCTURE

Political science has not reached high development in building the system of administration for poor relief in New York State. The same fault is noticeable as in the general structure of our democratic government; viz., the lack of useful centralization, infinite variations of method, and the impossibility of setting up a uniform system of bringing about among administrative officials, uniform understanding of the scope and purpose of poor relief. A theoretical central executive with thirty or forty theoretical administrative subordinates who in many respects are not his subordinates, and over whom he has no disciplinary powers, cannot be expected to accomplish much in the way of control or performance. Yet that is what we have in the office of our present county Superintendent of the Poor (or, in Westchester County, since January 1, 1917, the Commissioner of Charities and Corrections), and the township overseers of the poor.

"To provide free food and lodging to all who may apply is easy, but there is no more difficult task than to give "relief." The word "relief" is used by many people in a personal sense to mean supplying the immediate needs of an individual from public funds. This is a narrow but obvious interpretation. The real and only constructive meaning of the word demands that society and the taxpayer shall be "relieved" as well as the individual. To feed and house, at the expense of the taxpayer, a person who consumes his time and money in saloons is not rendering "relief" to him or to the public. To care for a feeble-minded woman during confinement and then turn her out into the world again to become the prey of the unscrupulous is not giving "relief" to her, to her offspring, or to the world at large. To cure a patient of tuberculosis and then return him in a weakened physical condition to the same occupation and surroundings in which he acquired the disease is not "relief" to him or to society. To take children from a competent mother and place them in an institution at double the cost of maintaining the home, "relieves" neither the family nor the community." (Annual Report of Superintendent of the Poor, V. E. Macy).

Every effort should be made to put the needy on their feet without making them objects of charity. It is desirable to give back to a man his health or strength, or to find a position for him even if the initial expense to the community is great at first: the public will save in the end and there is no question as to the benefit of the individual aided.

"How much better would be such a system of granting real relief instead of the present system which is well summed up by an overseer's statement, 'I give them just enough to make them stop "hollering."' Under such a system, the one who 'hollers' loudest is likely to get the most relief, although the silent one may be in the greatest need. It is easy to see that a substantial number of people not afraid to 'holler' can calculate upon this public relief as a part of their annual income and be shiftless during the summer because of aid in the winter." (1916 Conference of Charities, p. 340).

Assuming that Westchester County is typical of other counties except as to amounts, the tax paying public is entitled to better results from its investment in poor relief than is given under the prevalent practices. Fundamentally, poor relief should not be a mere palliative, but should strike at the root of the trouble. It should tend always to relieve the causes of the poverty and not merely feed and clothe the unfortunate indigent or the indolent.

Can this country hope for such desirable results from our present system?

Many of the overseers are conscientious men trying to carry out their duties properly. But the mere intention is not enough. Good intentions alone will not make a skilled machinist out of a coal heaver. Training for professional relief of poverty, and thorough knowledge of the state and county poor laws are necessary for success either as a public or as a private charity worker. None of the present overseers in Westchester County had any preliminary training or instruction in the relief of the poor and none had completely mastered the statutes governing the matter. Yet as soon as an overseer takes office, at the time when he is usually ignorant of the laws, he is most besieged with requests for aid.

Government in general, and poor relief in particular, are neither of them money making enterprises. They cost money and that money has to be supplied by the tax-payers. Whenever public money is spent, adequate results should be obtained for it. The situation in this County just described necessarily involves the conclusion that our money could be spent more efficiently, that is more economically, or in other words, to better advantage.

It is like the case of an untrained housekeeper who cannot for the same money get equal results with one who knows her work and does it. An untrained housekeeper who does not know her work is not economical.

The task of overcoming this difficulty is not an impossible one, but it involves radical change from the present statutory system. To secure any such change it is necessary first of all that some considerable part of the community should become aware of the actual present conditions.

It would be bad enough were the overseers properly qualified for the performance of their duties, but as is shown by the facts grouped in the preceding pages, not only are the great majority of overseers in no way trained for the duties of their office, but in many cases they are not cognizant of the most elementary provisions of the law, and there appears to be no practical means of compelling them to improve upon such conditions or alter them.

It is not sufficient to understand why our political structure is of such an inefficient nature. The founders of our republic feared that democratic institutions would suffer and tyranny result, were too much power given to those

chosen to rule. The fear was justified from previous experiences with tyranny, but our century and a quarter of national growth and political experience and evolution brought home the lesson that there can be too much decentralization for efficiency as well as too much centralization to be consonant with freedom. No risk to freedom is seen in a much greater centralization and control of poor relief than at present obtains; and it is clear that vastly greater efficiency can today be obtained in a county like Westchester by a greater centralization of poor relief along the lines of county organization, especially in view of the great change in the character of the population of the county, which is no longer a simple farming community of persons permanently settled in particular farming districts, where each man knows his neighbor, but a community of the most varied sub-metropolitan character, with a large urban, or floating population.

The conditions shown by our report are conditions which can largely be avoided. It must be apparent that the administration of poor relief is a matter not to be left to the discretion of incompetents with no conceptions of the meaning of relief, in many cases inclined to ignore the troublesome problems of putting men back on their feet, restoring their self-respect, making the poor self-supporting, providing them with employment, surrounding them with sanitary and healthful conditions, and not ready to consider and study every possible well-reasoned-out measure for enabling every citizen to work out some line of occupation, and with it his independence, and that of his family.

It is clear that for the proper conduct of such work special knowledge is necessary as well as an intelligent capacity for administering poor relief. It seems to the student of social problems that relief of the poor is a social function calling for trained service. Until we make legislative provisions for competent and trained administrative officers, working along some definite policy, we shall remain a long way from realization of proper relief, and a still longer distance from the elimination of poverty, even though the last objective might be obtainable.

Together with the requirement of special training, of a professional education, so to speak, there should go provision for proper compensation. The facts we have collected show that the fee system of payment does not work satisfactorily. It is inordinately expensive in the aggregate, and doubtless in some cases it results in inadequate compensation. An overseer in a small town who spent the time required to gain a clear understanding of his duties, and then had only a few cases, would be underpaid, and yet he could not properly discharge his duties without the knowledge.

It is expensive to educate thirty men as often as each election occurs to perform the duties which five or six men could perform more satisfactorily under a central supervision as long as they efficiently and intelligently performed their duties.

Unifying the control of extending and continuing relief would also eliminate a great amount of unnecessary work and save some friction. The work would be better done, and sham claims for relief would be more easily

detected. These are important practical considerations. Nor is it at all a bad feature that it would reduce the number of petty office-holders.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The following conclusions seem to be warranted by the conditions:—

1. That the town and county organizations as prescribed by statute for the administration of outdoor relief are inadequate for the present needs of Westchester County.

2. That the giving of alms at public expense without discriminating judgment as to actual needs tends to increase instead of diminish pauperism.

3. That the administration of genuine relief to the poor in such way as to help them to permanent rehabilitation or to provide properly for those permanently disabled requires specially trained public officers versed in the principles of scientific relief.

4. That the present method of electing or appointing, from the ordinary walks of life, overseers of the poor who have no training or preparation for the duties of their office, blocks the way to decrease of pauperism that otherwise might be attained. Such officials apparently cannot be expected to possess adequate knowledge of the poor laws nor to discriminate between actual need and the opposite, or to build up any plans for making the poor permanently self-sustaining.

5. That the decentralization of authority under the present law permits wide variation of practice and absence of uniformity in reports and accounts, resulting in confusion and mismanagement on the part of officials; and on the part of the public, ignorance of their own interests.

6. That it seems unwise that the commitment of public charges to asylums should be entrusted to so many different untrained officers in so small an area. Interests so vital may be effected by commitment to a public institution that the greatest possible care should be exercised in making every such commitment.

7. That the system of paying overseers by fees and on per diem basis opens the way to dishonest practices, sometimes to enormous cost of poor relief, especially where an overseer may charge a full day's pay for a few minutes time spent in issuing a single small order, which might have been issued on the day of the investigation for which a separate day's pay is charged.

8. That the present method of selecting merchants upon whom orders are drawn for supplies for relief of the poor opens the way to dishonest practices in the way of over-charges, short deliveries, and trading orders for cash on the part of the paupers. There is no compulsory method of control over such dealers.

9. That under the present system the law is frequently violated or evaded. While this is largely due to ignorance of the statutes or to the following of precedents, in some instances it has appeared to be deliberate and conscious.

Recommendations

It is recommended as follows:—

1. That the office of overseer of the poor be abolished; that in its place a social service department be established with trained workers under the supervision and direction of the County Commissioner of Charities and Corrections.

2. That the amount and character of temporary outdoor relief to be administered be left, within definite bounds, to the discretion of such trained workers with the approval of the County Commissioner of Charities and Corrections.

3. That provision should be made for monthly payment of bills for poor relief against either the towns or the county.

4. That merchants desiring to share in the furnishing of supplies should be investigated by the workers of the social service department and should be selected on a basis of quality and price of their goods and fidelity of service, and that a method should be devised of supervising and controlling the service and wares furnished by them, and the prices charged by them on poor orders.

5. That the law providing for the care or commitment of insane persons should be rigidly observed, and attempts of subordinate officers to commit persons without authority rigidly repressed.

6. That better provision should be made for the care of feeble minded adults; and that serious consideration be given to the question of segregating such persons, or otherwise guarding against propagation and increase of the feeble minded.

7. That better statutory provision be made for compelling deserting or inebriate heads of families to contribute to the support of their families.

8. That the Commissioner of Charities and Corrections be given the power to regulate or prohibit the sale of liquor to persons receiving poor relief.

Some Recommendations for Improved Administration without Abolishing Overseers of the Poor:—

1. That the per diem system of payment to overseers should be abolished and that their compensation be regulated according to the services performed. It is suggested that overseers be paid by salary, graded in amount according to the population and assessed valuation of the town, or else that the actual time employed by the overseer in poor relief be reported in the same manner as employees of corporations report their time, and the total hours so reported be reduced to an eight hour day basis, and the overseer paid accordingly. This should prevent charging a day's pay for ten minutes' work.

2. That town fiscal officers be held financially responsible by their towns for illegally paying to overseers mass appropriations to be expended by them.

3. That all claims for poor relief be properly itemized and verified and submitted for audit through the same course as other town charges.

4. That in towns where there is more than one overseer, each should have charge of a definite limited district, and that each overseer should have definite headquarters where he may be found for application for poor relief. (e. g. in the town of Rye, one overseer lives in Port Chester and the other in Mamaroneck—opposite ends of the town. In Mount Pleasant, both overseers live in Pleasantville.)

5. That all the laws concerning the overseer of the poor and outdoor relief should be consolidated, codified, and copies of such code furnished for the use of the overseers.

6. That overseers should be required before entering upon the duties of their office to give evidence of having familiarized themselves with such statutes and with the proper mode of procedure in case of applications for relief, and should be required to discharge their duties in person.



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